

MOVING HOUSE: MIGRATION AND THE PLACE OF THE HOUSEHOLD ON THE THAI PERIPHERY

This article addresses the significance of population migration in the upland areas that ethnically and otherwise constitute a periphery of Thailand. The case draws on my fieldwork with Mien (Yao) people in Phayao Province during 1992–1994.¹ In the course of my research, I learned of a sojourn that had brought the ancestors of this Mien population from southern China to the (then kingdom of) Nan during the 1870s and '80s. As I was learning this history, it became apparent that migrations can bring about various transformations. Rather than being solely the move of a group from one place to another, migrations also can radically alter social, cultural, and other dynamics. The events that the Mien people experienced on the sojourn from China to Nan, and the conditions of their settlement there, influenced aspects of their society, religion, and economy, in ways that make them unlike some other groups of Mien in Thailand. One point of this examination is that various factors of local histories can influence aspects of culture, society, and identity. The Mien case also shows how people revise their history, giving the past new kinds of significance in light of present concerns and realities. Studying how people relate to history and society suggests a need to rethink issues of representing migration. The ways that lowlanders commonly represent migrations by uplanders more often represent the imagination

of the modern state than the actual movement undertaken.

In recent years lowlanders in Thailand have conceptualized uplanders' settlement migrations in two ways. One, exemplified by a map in Paul and Elaine Lewis' (1984:8) *Peoples of the Golden Triangle*, shows with colored arrows where each of the tribes entered Thailand.² The other, exemplified by a Government survey done in 1965 concerning the frequency of migrations, gives the rate of household movement over a ten-year period for each of the ethnic groups. According to this survey, 92.1 per cent of Miao (Hmong) households had moved, about 75 per cent each of Lahu, Lisu, and Yao (Mien) households, 46.2 per cent of Akha households, and 24.4 per cent of Karen households (Geddes 1976:42). These two conceptualizations of migration both assume that the key issue concerns the movement of ethnic groups, both as a matter of entering Thailand and as an indication of the frequent mobility that lowlanders assume characterizes such groups.

These conceptualizations are based on two premises. One, discussed by Thongchai (1994) in his examination of how mapping created a bounded entity through which ideas of Thainess were defined, concerns the notion of upland groups as aliens on Thai soil. From this perspective, it makes sense to portray on a map the "main immigration routes" (Lewis and Lewis

1994:8) of each of the upland groups into Thailand. The second premise is that these groups of "non-Thai" uplanders have varying degrees of unruliness that can be ameliorated if they become more like the implicit definition of Thai, such as in becoming sedentary.

In other words, the two ways of depicting settlement migration among uplanders both concern elements of the construction of Thailand and Thai-ness. Both of these ways of understanding migration were entangled in definitions of uplanders as a national problem. One important point in this regard is that information of maps and censuses is not a measure of ethnographic fact. Rather, they are formulations of a national territory involving problems of defining who belongs and how, and what issues need to be brought under control. Fixing people in place is part of the "civilizing mission" of modern states in general, an effort that they share with its colonial precursor both in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. From the perspective of surveyors and administrators in the modern state, outlawing migration brings order to "unruly" populations. However, from another perspective, one assuming that these migrations were not manifestations of unruliness, could just as plausibly present these efforts of sedentarization as having deprived people of a freedom they had for centuries regarding their own livelihood.

But what was involved in such migrations? Was there anything more to this exercise than what may to an outsider look like either unruliness or freedom? Posing this question attempts to sidestep simplistic ethnographic stereotypes about the state and its ethnic Other. These stereotypes take different shapes. State administrators can frame local agency as unruliness while social scientists can, from an assumed upland perspective, frame "the overwhelming power of the state" (Radley 1986:78) and similar allegorical notions (see Clifford 1986; Ortner 1995; Taussig 1992).

In discussing issues of migration outside these interpretive frameworks of control versus freedom, one issue concerns how both lowlanders and social scientists assume the importance of an ethnic dimension in social life. This raises the question of whether mobility by households occurs along an ethnic pattern so

that the behavior of the households provides a microcosmic rendering of an ethnic group. Both the survey and the map referred to above assume that the mobility of households adds up to the proportionate mobility of ethnic groups. Each presents an aspect of the behavior of ethnic groups as if there were a direct link between the household and an ethnic collectivity. Such is also the perspective that Peter and Sally Kunstadter (1992) adopt for their examination of environmental changes in northern Thailand, where they contrast the land-use practices and the associated household- and settlement mobility of Lua', Karen, and Hmong. They analyze settlement patterns among Lua', Karen, and Hmong in northern Thailand in ecological terms.

I argue that, rather than indicating the ecological adaptation of different ethnic groups, the relative stability of social arrangements is rooted not in ethnic but in historical factors, such as uneven connections with courts. For example, in Lua' villages, access to swidden lands was controlled by members of a founder lineage. Members of other lineages paid tribute to the chief priest, whose lineage was traced to one of the Lua' princes or the last Lua' king, who ruled Chiang Mai before the Tai takeover of the lowlands (sometime between the 7th and the 13th centuries). In contrast, Hmong settlements were ad hoc collections of households that moved about with shifts in soil fertility. Karen villages fall between these two cases, being more mobile than Lua', while having more of a village structure than Hmong.

Lua' have a long history of relations with Tai courts and some Tai state founder myths provide accounts of the expulsion of the Lua' (Condominas 1990; Jonsson 1996a; Swearer and Premchit 1998). When Karen entered northern Thai domains in the 19th century, to the extent that they had dealings with lowland courts, they were sometimes placed under Lua' chiefs. In contrast, Hmong entered Thai domains largely after that period and thus stood outside these tributary arrangements. Such tributary arrangements benefited some ethnic groups more than others. These arrangements helped shape ethnic encounters on the fringe of the lowland domains, both in the sense of affirming particular ethnic labels and in affecting how particular political

and economic interests have been played out. In promoting the interests of Lua' chiefs, northern Thai rulers affected the relative position of Lua' commoners and constrained the arena for Karen political action to such an extent that the rise of Karen chiefs became impossible (Jonsson 1998a).³

The ideology of customs is related to social pressures on patterns in the mobilization of people's labor, resources, and attentions. The difference among Lua', Karen, and Hmong shows how historical interactions in the region promote different interests simultaneously and how rituals reaffirm particular social visions. For these Lua', founder lineages construct their prominence through their ritual privileges and tribute relations and through stories of princely lines, which other Lua' can then place themselves within or opt to stand outside. Accounts of some Karen villages in the 1960s show how the leaders of a village expected a satellite settlement to be ritually subordinate, drawing on the spirit of the mother-village, but the people in the offshoot village went ahead and conducted their own rituals to a village spirit, thereby declaring their autonomy. In Hmong cases from the same time, there were no village-structures that compromised the interests of households, but kinship ideologies sustained a tension among the levels of nuclear and extended households (Kunstadter 1967; Hinton 1973; Geddes 1976; Cooper 1984).

Mobile households and transient settlements, which Kunstadter and Kunstadter (1992) associate with Hmong, are related to the lack of official control over the highlands and the limited ability of upland chiefs to stabilize client populations. Migrations that were so pervasive in the northern Thai highlands from the beginning of this century and until the 1970s reflect the households' ability to strike out on their own. Villages were significantly smaller than before *pax colonialis*,⁴ when slave-raids and warfare made organization for defense a necessity. Nonetheless people still clustered for various reasons, such as trade, exchange of labor and spouses, and as audience and backing for rituals and feasts. It is not that people either "have" a village or not. Instead their settlements take shape from the resolution of tensions among several levels of interest, such as households,

kin-groups, villages, and larger units (Jonsson 1997; 1998b).

Migration needs to be seen in this context of tension resolution among societal levels as well. Population mobility has played a part in the construction of social units and relations in the same way as ritual. Frequent moves of individual households are related to frequent rituals at the household level. Similarly, moves that involve a cluster of villages assume agency at the supra-village level. Although people cannot remain on the move indefinitely, migrations and rituals both reflect and construct particular social orderings. Migration can accommodate the interests of chiefs, as when a descendant of a chiefly lineage departs with followers to establish a domain of his own, replicating the structure of relations at the point of the move's origin. Migration can also impede such replication, such as when the followers of a chief leave his domain in protest. The populations that I discuss here fall within the category of migratory shifting cultivators, and part of my aim is to show that reference to agricultural adaptation provides only partially explains the dynamics of migration.

The pattern of social relations over time responds to tensions among societal levels, such as between chiefs and commoners, and/or competition among households regarding prominence or relative equality. There is, in other words, no inherent coherence of interests between the household and the village or the ethnic group that would contribute to stable social arrangements. From this, it follows that studies which make generalizations for ethnic groups based on information regarding household behavior, or which take information about social organization from village chiefs at face value, may be fundamentally misleading. The information such studies provide on ethnic groups may reflect more about the expectations of the researcher than the social reality supposedly being described. Most of the anthropological research conducted in the northern Thai hills has been informed by the assumptions of "classical" anthropology, that the members of an ethnic group share a culture, social organization, and a way of life. This approach has since been roundly criticized for an inability to deal with history. My account is

aimed at some of the issues of social life in history, both concerning social formations and their anthropological representation, but my aim is more descriptive than theoretical.

People's migration, as well as efforts to halt it, are ways of defining the social landscape, asserting particular positions in an ongoing debate about the composition and shape of the social universe and people's relative position within it. Presupposing clear divisions among spheres of politics, livelihood, religion, and so on, obscures the fundamental indivisibility of the world in which people live. Migrations and ritual have contributed to an ongoing recasting of relations and identities in the hinterland region that lies between China and Southeast Asia. My discussion covers some of the cultural politics that shaped the region and its history. How people assemble their villages reveals patterns in people's assumptions about the world, not only in the ethnic sense of separate groups but equally how interactions within a multi-societal region affect the ways people form social units and how they relate to larger structures (Appadurai 1996).

Leach (1954) argued that although ethnographers can find as many tribes as they care to look for, social dynamics in the Kachin highlands of northern Burma could be reduced to shifts among several ideal models: autocratic (gumsa) and democratic (gumlao) highland models, and a stratified lowland model (Shan). Showing the importance of trade, warfare, and taxation, Leach emphasized the role of ideals about kinship and ways in which ritual and myth were used to construct models of social relations that assumed particular political shape that are discernable from relations within and among villages.

Contrasting gumlao and gumsa systems, Leach noted that gumsa political domains contained a number of villages under one chief, who alone was entitled to make major sacrifices, while gumlao domains consisted of villages of equal status, each of which managed their own rituals. Within gumsa, lineages were ranked into chiefs, aristocrats, commoners, and slaves, and most people must contribute a thigh of any animal caught and labor for the chief's hillfields and the construction of his house. Within gumlao systems villagers owed their headmen no dues

(Leach 1954:204–05). Chiefs have their position because they stand in a particular relationship with a spirit of the domain that brings prosperity to villagers and they alone can make offerings to this spirit (1954:172–77). This pattern of unequal relations to spirits is common for the region, in both the lowlands as well as the highlands, but with differing social ramifications.

Such complex and shifting relationships among chiefs and commoners and involving ritual and migrations seem to be common, but they have only rarely been examined. One explanation is that there is little space for analyzing such shifts within the focus on ethnic groups by state administrators and social scientists.

In order to present an alternative to these descriptive conventions, I will describe aspects of social and ritual relations among one of many Mien populations in northern Thailand. Events beginning with a group of people migrating show how ritual and social focus shifts between a chief and householders in ways that disprove the assumption that the social dynamics of households and an ethnic group mirror each other.

A group of people, mostly Mien (Yao) but also Hmong (Miao/Meo) had made their slow way from Guangxi and Guangdong to eventually settle in Nan. This migration took over a decade, ending in the 1880s. At the time of the actual migration, I assume the people were venturing into the unknown. The ability of the leader to bring his followers through such uncertain and sometimes dangerous conditions is part of what established his leadership. During a crisis situation the leader entered a relationship with the spirit of the king of the domain where they were at the time. Subsequent offerings to this spirit, which came to be known to the movers as the King's Spirit, have continued to reproduce both the social unity of the migration-group and the prominence of the leader until the present.

This King's Spirit is confined to this particular migration group and it is only the leader and his descendants who are able to maintain this relationship. There is no indication in the ethnographic record that other groups of Mien have had a relationship with this or another King's Spirit. One way to characterize this cult

is to draw parallels with other upland religious movements that rely on spirits of royalty in domains that stand outside the state. Some such cults are related to confrontations with lowland rulers or armies, while others have had a more ambivalent political position (Walker 1974; Hinton 1979; Tsing 1987; 1993; Tapp 1989; Salemink 1994). This is not to insist that religious movements can be political, but to suggest that positing such domains ("religion," "politics," and also "uplands" vs. "lowlands") as discrete and unassociated does not reflect the everyday reality of upland farmers (Kirsch 1973; Hinton 1983). This King's Spirit cult has some things in common with founder cults. In the ethnographic record, comparable cults are most often noted as pertaining to villages or village-clusters. Cults that have a broader social scope, such as the Mien cult of the King's Spirit, are both less common and less stable.

The upland areas of Southeast Asia are known for the impermanence of social arrangements, the result of both tensions in ritual life and shifting relations with lowland domains. Tensions in ritual life concern the ongoing construction of social units and their relations through offerings and feasts. These are both directly and indirectly affected by relations with lowland domains. A central factor is the creation of the upland-lowland divide that establishes the categorical opposition between forested wilderness where uplanders live and cleared lowlands where the state made itself through the distribution of rule, rank, and relationships. Categorically speaking, the uplands are beyond the state and it was of no concern to lowland rulers how many people lived in the forest and how they went about their lives. But in practice there were various relations in spite of this division since uplanders were a source of valuable forest products, and, in some cases, they served as soldiers or border scouts. Within both Chinese and Southeast Asian domains, there are instances where such relations were reinforced with lowland titles for upland leaders (Diamond 1993; Drakard 1990; Renard 1986). These complicate the social scope of upland and lowland domains. Upland areas become satellites to lowland domains through such contracts and this can reshape processes of community formation in the uplands, for instance

in the relative ability of households to act on their own.

Marching through Myth

The migration group I examine began its move from Guangxi and Guangdong of southern China in about 1860. The group went through various domains of northern Vietnam and Laos before settling down in the kingdom of Nan in the 1880s, where their leader, Tang Tsan Khwoen, received a title from the king (Jonsson 1998b:200–07). The list of domains that the people stayed in on their sojourn is preserved in chants to the King's Spirit, which is a spirit specific to this migration group. In annual chants that maintain the relationship with this spirit, the medium lists the domains whose rulers the population has had relations with: Muang Long, Muang Siang, Muang Khwa, Muang Tsan, Muang Lai, Muang La, Muang Hun, Muang Nan. This list of domains is not common knowledge, nor is it presented as "history" or as "migration." Instead, it appears in the context of the annual renewal of a relationship with a particular spirit, and acknowledges the domain-spirits that the population has had some relations with. The Mien people I consulted with think that the Muang of Siang, Khwa, and Tsa are within Muang Long, in Guangxi. Muang Lai and La are in northern Vietnam,⁵ Muang Hun in Laos, and Muang Nan what now is Nan Province.

The migration is remembered in terms of relations with spirits, in particular how spirits preserved the well-being of their people. These accounts tell of two important confrontations: one in which a royal spirit made the leader invulnerable during an attack by Chinese warlords⁶ and the other in which ancestors advised the people to leave a domain whose lowland inhabitants were attacking them. The two kinds of spirits, royal and ancestral, point to two important dimensions of the people's social identity, as a unified migration group and as separate householders. The episode with the King's Spirit made the leader of the migration into a founder of the group, in ways that correspond to Mien origin stories.

The migration group had learned of an imminent attack by an army of Chinese people.

Tsan Khwoen then made an offering to the spirit of the king of the domain. When the attack came, it was clear that the spirit had made Tsan Khwoen invulnerable. Whenever the Chinese aimed their guns at him, he was immediately transported to another location. They would re-aim, only to find Tsan Khwoen had disappeared again. The highlanders successfully fended off the attack. This episode seems to have occurred during the "Ho raids" between 1869 and 1874 (Breazeale and Snit 1988:47–9). These raids, and Bangkok's attempts at suppression, continued into the 1880s, but official accounts do not provide information that would help to date the Mien episode.

This event established the relationship between Tsan Khwoen and the spirit of the king of the domain. He has to renew this relationship annually to avoid losing this unusual connection with the spirit world. Tsan Khwoen proved himself to his followers in the episode when he successfully made a deal with the King's Spirit. The event, while unique, corresponds to events from Mien mythology in a way that makes it immediately comprehensible and compelling.

The most striking parallel to this account is the "Crossing the Ocean" origin story (see Lemoine 1982:17–18; Beard et al. 1995:1–9). This story relates that once upon a time in China, the Mien were living in the mountains. For three years in a row there were droughts. When, during the third year, fires destroyed their crops, the Mien left the area, going downriver in boats. On reaching a big ocean, storms overturned some boats while a big whirlpool took others. The people in one boat called on the spirit of Pien Hung to save them, promising to make regular offerings to him if he got them safely ashore. The storm calmed and the boat landed with all the people unharmed. The boat had members from each of the twelve lineages. Lombard describes this story as "the legend of the origins of the Yao clans". They reached shore safely, and "have appeased the spirits ever since" (1968:206).

The ability to successfully make a contract confirms the relationship, between the leader of a social unit and the ruler/spirit and between the leader and the rest of the migration group. The contract helps sustain social units and relationships when social identities and the cohesion of

social units grow tenuous. If the spirits and leaders do not take good care of them, people will abandon them both and enter another contract elsewhere. The underlying assumption about contracts, which applies to Mien relations with spirits and rulers, is that while both sides meet their obligations, things are well and both have a reason to continue the arrangement, but if one side does not live up to its part of the deal, then the other can revoke it.

This rescue by the King's Spirit created obligations between Tsan Khwoen and the spirit and between members of the migration group and him as their leader. By extension this made Tsan Khwoen favorably disposed to entering into relationships with lowland kings. The first one, however, took an unfortunate turn. After the Mien had lived for some time in the Tai domain of Muang Lai, some lowlanders placed the body of a Tai man against the door of a Mien house and accused the Mien of having killed him. The Mien made an offering to the household's ancestors and asked what offering could cancel the offense. The spirits replied that nothing would do and advised the people to leave immediately. After their rapid departure, the lowlanders destroyed everything they could find.

A few years later, after an uneventful stay in Muang Hun, the uplanders moved to Nan. The initial refusal by the king of Nan for the Mien to settle may have been a way to press for benefits from the highlanders, who would otherwise have had to continue their sojourn.

Migrations contribute to an ongoing realignment of relationships and reworkings of identities. While the migrating highlanders and the king of Nan had never met before, they had a categorical knowledge of each other, as "highlanders" and a "lowland king," and based on such knowledge they entered a relationship. These relationships did not match the bounded, separate ethnic societies and stable social structures of classical anthropology (Leach 1954; Lehman 1963; Kirsch 1973). Nor does the account of this Mien and Hmong migration settling in Nan reaffirm the framework that lies behind the mapping of the entry of discreet ethnic groups into Thailand. Since the boundaries of Thailand had not yet been delineated in their present form, there was, for instance, no

“Thailand” to enter at the time.⁷ A perspective more appropriate to the region at this time would characterize this region in terms of shifting networks of social units that add up to what the historian Wolters (1982:x) describes as “zone[s] of subregional histories,” that overlapped and were reshaped as people moved about or new leaders offered prospective clients favorable options. It is within such an unstable environment, during a period of frequent warfare, that Tang Tsan Khwoen, the man who became Phaya Khiri, moved with his followers.

In such pre-national times, lowland rulers established their domains by constructing networks of goods and services through the distribution of rank and relationships. As this occurred, they bestowed identities, a process which extended to the uplands. Yao are “Yao” because of a particular relationship between their ancestor and a Chinese emperor. Aside from the ethnic label, this relationship shaped: the Yao lineage system; religious practices; their ability to migrate in the hinterlands of southern China without paying tribute to the court; as well as Yao leaders’ ability to extract tribute from their followers and rule over various non-Yao hinterland populations (Jonsson 2000). In principle, this relationship contributed to a high-level integration of Yao society, similar to the way Chiang Mai’s relations with a Lua’ leader made one titled leader the center of that upland-lowland relationship.⁸ Notions of ethnic identity relate to parameters of social relations that add up to the scope and stability of communities and domains. Historically, the region has been generally bifurcated into forested highlands and cleared lowlands, and ethnic divisions reaffirmed this spatial divide.

All these units that are founded, fade away if they are not maintained through the mobilization of people’s attentions, labor, and/or resources. There are important historical and regional shifts in the relative prominence of the available structures such as households, villages, kin-groups, village clusters, migrations, segmentary lineage systems, and/or ethnic groups. They also differ in what can be called their visibility. The accounts of the migration fit schemes of Mien origin myths, they resonate with a historical consciousness that has privileged population groups. Mien history

makes chiefs highly visible, as agency in migration groups is generally collapsed onto chiefs (on “heroic history” more generally, see Sahlins 1985, ch.2). Chiefs as agents of history appear to be a general feature of histories in upland societies.

One example is that among Lisu in the 1960s, who at the time were largely acting in terms of nuclear households, storytelling often described the killing of headmen. The telling of stories and/or history in which group histories are embedded also define in part group customs and social relations. Ethnographic accounts of Lisu indicate that the prominence of nuclear households was asserted and affirmed equally through frequent migrations, rituals at the household level, and stories of chiefs being killed (Dessaint 1971; Durrenberger 1983). Lisu rituals constitute a cult with no founder, as the Lisu actively erode supra-household claims such as on resources, labor, and/or attentions (see also Hutheesing 1990).

Founder-cults, such as Tsang Khwoen’s link to the King’s Spirit that secured his prominence in the migration group he led, also redefine local domains. Ritual offerings to the King’s Spirit reaffirm a social unit through the exchange relations between the leader and the spirit and between the followers and the leader. Tsan Khwoen, unlike chiefs among Kachin or Lua’, did not work in his fields, but like chiefs in other upland situations he received as tribute a basket of rice from each household under him. Tsan Khwoen’s relationship with this spirit stayed at the migration-level, it did not become a cult that could be activated by each village. Only the leader, and then one descendant in each generation after him, can maintain the relationship with the spirit. His great grandson, Tang Tsoi Fong, now continues the relationship.

Mien villages are ritual units, and from what I know among Mien in Thailand, households make voluntary contributions to collective offerings (Jonsson 1998b; Kandre 1991). The rhetorics of Mien villages assumes a founder, someone who “opens the forest” and invites the spirit of the most powerful local ruler, a titled lowland official in the cases I know, to become the owner spirit of the site.⁹ New Year is a time for renewing contracts with spirits, and among

the Mien I worked with each household is supposed to make an offering to its ancestors. Villagers pooled resources for the offering to the village owner spirit. The *kamnan* (sub-district headman) makes an offering to the King's Spirit. Rather than constructing or reflecting the prominence of a headman or a chief, village-level rituals construct villages as voluntary assemblies of equal households and place Mien within a social universe where lowland officials rule territory. Through their leader, villagers enter a relationship with the spirit of such official. These rituals, as social statements, construct the prominence of lowland officials as powerful outsiders that are in the same category as spirits. Ritual relations can involve various inequalities and politics more generally, but there is no inherent social resonance in a ritual relationship as such (see Bloch 1986; Jonsson 1998b).

Households have been the primary ritual units among Thailand's Mien in this century. Nonetheless, what constitutes a household and the relationships among households is not straightforward. Each household is a separate entity for rituals to ancestors and cadastral spirits, but it acts individually in the former and collectively in the latter. At weddings, the assembled act as if they belong to two households, those of hosts and guests. The roles of hosts and guests are important for the feasts that follow all rituals, except for rituals to cadastral spirits. The cadastral spirit ritual is the only one not held in household; it is usually held near the largest tree at the edge of the village and only the mediums and representatives of each participating household attend. The King's Spirit ritual, in contrast, is always held at the house of the leader, first Tsan Khwoen, and then one individual in each subsequent generation, who inherits both his leadership position (now *kamnan*) and the responsibility for this relationship.

The stability of such cults depends on a number of factors, the most important ones being the expectations of the followers, the relative ability of the leaders to deliver well-being to their constituents, and the kinds of relations leaders have with lowland rulers. Although it was during the migration that Tsan Khwoen's prominence overrode his followers' obligations

to their ancestor spirits and their exchange relationships at levels other than the migration, the dimensions of this cult were shaped in important ways by the place of these uplanders within the larger social landscape.

Religion on the Move

The group moved through a territory of frequent warfare with a leader of considerable prowess whose link to the King's Spirit reinforced his prominence and his followers' reliance on him. The move itself reproduced certain patterns of Mien mythology that suggest a fundamental continuity in Mien worldview and social relations. This seems the case particularly since this cult has now been maintained more than a hundred years. But more than any ritual replication of Mien tradition, this apparent continuity relies on the leaders' immediate descendants being invested in accounts of his prominence and the institutionalization of their prominence through titles and other links to lowland authorities. This included initially the Thai government's Royal Opium Monopoly and now the provincial administration and other such agencies that encourage national integration.

The route is far from direct. My account of Tsan Khwoen draws on a range of sources; aside from local recollections that I encountered or asked after, these are missionary accounts from early in the century, and accounts by visitors, amateur ethnologists, and a professional anthropologist (Park 1907; Callender 1915; Le May 1926; Bunchuai 1950; Blofeld 1955; 1960; Miles 1967–68; 1974; 1990; Jonsson 1996b). Tsan Khwoen received the title Phaya Inthakhiri from the King of Nan.¹⁰ As the highlanders' overlord, he received tribute from his followers some of which he transmitted to the king. Tsan Khwoen's house was the only one on stilts, in the Thai style, an architectural separation from the rest of the population that signified in part his royal connections. Tsan Khwoen appears to have been quite wealthy. He often visited the court in Nan. In the 1900s, the highlanders were allowed to grow opium for the Royal Opium Monopoly on a particular mountain (since then known as Doi Suan Ya Luang, "Royal Opium Field Mountain"—it appears the mountain was previously called Doi Chang) and officials made

an annual inspection.¹¹ Aside from opium, highlanders were able to sell rice in Nan. Tsan Khwoen's sons traded separately from their father. His sons combined their households under one roof, 12 families with a total of 86 people.

The generational difference between Tsan Khwoen and his sons seems to correspond with a shift in the articulation of prowess. Tsan Khwoen's house was separate from the others by its elevation and wooden construction while his sons' house had an unusually high number of occupants. Tsan Khwoen relied on military success and his invulnerability and, subsequently, his position as the local general and tribute collector. Acting in more peaceful conditions, his sons' prowess was articulated in terms of householding, farming, and trade (for a fuller discussion, see Jonsson n.d. a).

Wuen Lin, Tsan Khwoen's son who succeeded him, received the title Thao La from the King of Nan and was subsequently made a *kamnan* (sub-district headman) when the area was bought into the official Thai provincial administration. He had moved his household to Phulangka after his father's death. There, he was the center of an extensive trade in locally produced opium for provincial and national agencies. For some time in the 1940s, Wuen Lin had a household of 120 people. Both he and his father are remembered as having had complete control in the highlands and as having kept the area peaceful and safe. As with leaders in other "chiefly" situations, they brought order by enforcing customs, in particular against thieving.

People varied in how they remembered Thao La's rule. Some said he actively made the area peaceful and safe; others that he sat in his house and mediated disputes that people brought to him; and yet others that he maintained a reign of terror, arbitrarily punishing people he did not like. I was told that Thao La had sometimes decided cases by lining up suspects and holding a spear from the king of Nan in front of him: with the help of the King's Spirit, the spear would point to the culprit of whatever crime had been committed.

In this way, the King's Spirit has contributed to the prominence of the leader outside of situations of military confrontations. The spirit's role has changed in the context of more peaceful

village life. While I did my fieldwork, there were several cases of serious theft, such as a motorcycle and no one knew who was the thief. The victims offered a pig to request the King's Spirit's help. In the cases I know of, this led to the successful recovery of the stolen object. The spirit has, to some extent, been coopted for the general public, although the offerings can only take place at the leader's house, in this case the grandson of Thao La. The cult of the King's Spirit was initially connected to the invulnerability of the migration leader and, subsequently, to his and his sons' ability to maintain law and order among their followers. Currently, people can make the offering at the house of the sub-district headman, however, this is only done when offerings to ancestor spirits are not effective. Making offerings implies the unique ritual connections of the leader household, and simultaneously, provides the opportunity for people to feast their leader at his own house. This "commoner" access to the King's Spirit reflects in part the changing character of leadership within this Mien population, from the commanding role that Thao La is remembered for and to the more passive role of the current subdistrict-headman. Some of the difference may concern the personalities of the two men, but they are to an important degree a measure of how recent political and economic changes have curtailed local leadership.

The cult of the King's Spirit has to be viewed in the context of Mien social life over time. Initially, it was seen as framing a situation where agency was concentrated in a leader during a migration. The cult loses some of its resonance once the group settled in Nan, where people have articulated notions of religion and worldview in terms of farming and householding rather than migration and armed confrontations. But the leader's prominence remained as has his focus on the King's Spirit. The King of Nan with his ability to allow settlement, bestow titles, and facilitate the legal cultivation of opium further reinforced the leader's position and the importance of his relationship to the King's Spirit.¹² Subsequently, the way Tsan Khwoen's sons maintained a multiple family household set a new standard for householding, and led to an inflationary pressure on household production

and ritual. But this inflationary pressure did not affect all households equally. Large multi-family households reduced the autonomy of nuclear households. Where authorities had less control over opium production and trade and over uplanders more generally, householders could strike out on their own and form small settlements or even stay in fieldhuts and not engage in village life. Wuen Lin's (Thao La) privileged trade position was not available to everyone. Thai authorities recognized five villages that constituted the sub-district of Pha Chang Noi and only people in those villages were in a position to forge official links to opium traders. This reinforced a bifurcation in household formations, between small households in transient settlements and large, multiple household units in a few, stable, officially recognized villages.

This situation also reinforced the prominence of the founder group that maintained its link to the King's Spirit, but it also contributed to other people's ability to move away from the leader and the cult that assumed that the migration group was still a social entity. The prominence of the founder cult faded as people were able to strike out on their own even though unequal trade connections reaffirmed the leader's position. The move to a multiple household reinforced the ritual affirmation of social differentiation, as a household is a ritual unit even though the people may have separate fields.

Between 1880 and the 1960s this Mien migration exhibits the same range of political and ritual orders that Peter and Sally Kunstader (1992) identify with Lua', Karen, and Hmong as ethnically separate adaptations to the environment that imply particular arrangements in village affairs.

I have reversed that framework by placing the main emphasis on how particular social arrangements are the outcome of the ways religious movements and political hierarchies are played out in multi-ethnic and multi-societal settings over time. The dynamics of the initial migration and subsequent moves of villages and households were dependent on a conceptual scheme that separated the uplands from the lowlands. This situation came to an end in the late 1960s as the nation state extended its control over its frontiers—through warfare, roads,

schools, and other factors. One aspect of this process of change was a radical shift in what shifting cultivation signified, and thus what shifting cultivators represented. Previously, shifting cultivation marked people as outside the state and of no particular interest or consequence, but as of the late-1950s it came to mark people as subversives to national order, who posed a threat to political and ecological stability. These changing ideas coincided with, and accelerated, the push toward integration through roads, schools, and, to some extent, military attacks.

Grounding a Founder

The issue of migrations, such as the one discussed above, might seem trivial because settlement migration in Thailand has since the 1960s become legally impossible. Nonetheless, I suggest nonetheless that these issues are worth exploring, not the least because the notions of founders and migrations are taking on new dimensions as upland peoples reinterpret their place within the bounded national space of Thailand. During my fieldwork with Mien in northern Thailand (1992–94), I lived primarily in Pangkha village, the resettled village of Phulangka that is known through Douglas Miles' work (see references). One night, a villager hosted a party for most of the village. He had killed a cow and all of us were being fed the meat, roasted "Korean style," vegetables, and liquor.¹³

A Thai schoolteacher in this predominantly Mien village played an electric keyboard and sang Thai pop-songs. An insurance salesman, a brother of the farmer that sponsored the feast, conducted something of a pop-quiz. He offered an apple as prize for a correct answer to his question of who had contributed most to the sub-district—Pha Chang Noi, in Pong District, Phayao Province, near Thailand's border with Laos. Some of the assembled named the headmaster of the local school, and others the headman of the village and the sub-district. Both men were present. People clapped their hands in encouragement for each suggestion, although there was noticeably more enthusiasm for the headmaster. There is tension between the two households regarding prominence in local

affairs. The headmaster is brother to the farmer whose feast this was as is the insurance salesman, who lives in the provincial capital and had come to the village only for a short visit.

The farmer in this account is the local big man; he owns a big truck and two large tractors that he uses to work his fields and to rent out. He runs a store in the village and he is assistant to his uncle, the sub-district headman. Once he commented that when he and his cousin, the other assistant headman, went around the sub-district they acted as if they were in control, unlike the headman who had, "no vision." As befits a Thai big-man, this assistant headman owns a pistol and has a sizable entourage.

And who had contributed most to the sub-district? Not the farmer, presumably since to "contribute to a sub-district" one has to bring about things of administrative significance. But neither the headman nor the headmaster had the distinction according to the insurance salesman. The apple went to a young villagewoman for the suggestion of Phaya Khiri Srisombat (Tang Tsan Khwoen) as the person who fit the bill. At least some people clapped with relief that the tension between the headman and the headmaster was diverted in this way. I was puzzled by the solution, since Phaya Khiri had never lived in this sub-district. He had died in the 1920s, about two decades before it was formed. When I pressed some villagers for clarification the next day, they brushed aside my concern for historical accuracy as trivial. This case shows one aspect of how local people are remaking their past in terms of the present, fitting their initial leader inside the subsequent reality of contemporary administrative units.

The headmaster had plans for a statue of Phaya Khiri at the site of Phulangka village. This site, where no one lives anymore, is where the people of Pangkha lived, from the time Phaya Khiri died in the 1920s until Thai authorities moved people out of the area in 1968 to quell an insurgency which had spread there. There had been some talk of a new bridge between Thailand and Laos nearby and the headmaster hoped to bring some benefits of tourism to the area. He organized a day-long outing for an MP and his entourage that included a trip to the site of Phulangka and a waterfall nearby so the politician could see the potential for a resort

development to replace upland farming that was increasingly being outlawed.

Another goal of that trip was to convey to the MP the need for agricultural assistance to Hmong villagers in the area. The Hmong, who were the main targets of attacks on suspected communist insurgents in the hills after 1967,¹⁴ were now threatening to draw on their connections to insurgency groups outside the country to massacre a Thai Highway Department work camp unless they received some agricultural assistance.

There is an interesting parallel between how Tsan Khwoen called on the King's Spirit to prevent a massacre of his followers from an army of warlords in a Lao domain and how Khe Kwin, his great-great-grandson and the headmaster of the Pangkha school, called on the MP to prevent a massacre of Highway Dept. workers in the area by insurgency groups at the same time as he airs the possibility of a statue to honor the founder. The match in the pattern of the two events is not mythical in the way the King's Spirit episode matches the story of Crossing of the Ocean. But the similarities also highlight the fundamental difference in cultural politics between the two events. Both events establish a relationship that brings the highlanders into lowland orbits and affects leadership and other local politics among the highlanders. But in the former, a ritual establishes a contract with the spirit of a king through the leader of a migration group. In the latter, the politician is physically brought to the area, feted, and then sent off. The agricultural assistance that arrived six months later may be likened to the results of an offering. The politician receives most of the votes from these highlanders during elections.

The difference between the two is not that the former is a ritual and the latter a "real" relationship. Both are real relationships, while they are also rituals. Looking at how they reflect and simultaneously construct social units and their relationships, within the highlands and between the highlands and the lowland political order, makes this more than an exercise in possible structural parallels and permutations.

The King's Spirit cult is informed by dynamics of ritual that draw on competitive householding in areas beyond the state's reach.

The way this householding is played out changes over time, depending on historically particular situations in the highlands and the way they affect leader-follower relations. The process of how the Thai state, or any of the other states in the area, has undermined the previous cultural autonomy of highland groups is complicated, and this is not the place to establish that history. By comparing the recent emergence of Phaya Khiri as a founder with the cult of the King's Spirit that he initiated, I want to suggest some aspects of the contemporary transformations of culture and society in the hinterlands.

An obvious difference is that, since the 1960s, households no longer use rituals competitively to impress potential followers or members. Once the state took over the highlands and required land registration and use-right papers, uplanders could no longer sustain a labor-dependent competition among households through rituals and farming. Nor could they take off and establish new settlements. Feasting is decreasingly at the household level and increasingly at the level of the village. One example is that the pretext for inviting the MP was for him to give the opening speech at a sub-district level sports competition and fun fair (see Jonsson 1999).

Such events, which place highlanders within a context of lowland village fairs and bring them into Thai society, require coordination at the village level. Households serve as providers of labor and resources for such village level events and this context patterns interactions in particular ways. Such village fairs are ritual statements about community. The necessary patterns in mobilizing people's labor, resources, and attentions are related to the systemic decline in household-centrality that characterized upland social formations in settings that ranged from household autonomy to chiefly situations.

Just as migration has particular social consequences, for instance in collapsing agency on the leader, so do village fairs and sub-district events. These both reinforce the social resonance of the Thai state's administrative units just as the migration affirmed the social separation of the group from lowland domains. Villages have replaced households as the loci of action which emphasizes the visibility of such units as schools and meeting halls. School headmasters, such as in

Pangkha, are in a position to impress their agendas on the social landscape in ways that used to belong only to householders.¹⁵

These dynamics draw on the motivations of individual people in particular settings. The wider context cannot account for the King's Spirit cult any more than for the sub-district level fair. People draw on the options and constraints of a regional context to play out their specific projects. One can propose a narrow interpretation of such events as rivalries between two households or a broader one in terms of relations between upland and lowland groups or a minority and the state. My examples embrace both the narrow and broader concerns and show how particular ritual frameworks and political domains emerge from the everyday lives of people in particular situations.

It is the headmaster's idea to erect a statue of Phaya Khiri at the site of Phulangka. Many of his projects draw on a Thai middle-class discourse on culture and social life, but cannot be reduced to this since they are simultaneously motivated by his ambitions to leadership and his desires to benefit his people. He wants the Mien leader recognized as the founder of that area and the imagery he draws on concerns recent efforts to make the nation visible and imaginable through statues in each province. Just as the King's Spirit emerges from a generative system of spirits and social relations, the idea of the statue of Phaya Khiri draws on a national discourse of provincial and national heroes that are commemorated in provincial capitals (see Tannenbaum 2000. For Indonesian parallels, see Hoskins 1987; Cunningham 1989). Once this discourse is established, it can generate the idea of statues on other levels. What this suggests is that the idea of founders among these highlanders has been reframed in terms of the Thai nation-state.

The process does not directly reflect either state hegemony or local agency but is in between, as the articulation of nation-state structures in the hinterlands has undone the agency of households unless it is expressed through villages and other administrative units. This provides the framework for ambitious locals to act on particular levels and to activate particular subjects of action. This results in specific patterns in the units of social life and the



The King and Queen of Yao

relationships among them that tend to privilege the village and its school as the focus of local social life and as the link to the nation (see Jonsson 1999, n.d.b).

Domestic Focus

When I made a brief visit to the village in 1998, I did not learn of any action regarding the statue. It could be that the recent economic troubles in the region dampened some people's enthusiasm. There was, for instance, no indication that the idea for a new bridge linking Laos and Thailand was anything more than an idea. The only clear manifestation of Phaya Khiri's new-found prominence I noticed was the display of his photograph. At least some people knew that Thao La's only living son, a long-time trader in the town of Chiang Kham, had a copy. Whereas in 1994, no one seemed concerned about the photo, it has now been brought out of obscurity. I saw a print of it at the headman's house, where it has been enlarged to dominate other photos on the wall. The others included one of Thao La and one of his three wives. This photo was not known locally before my research when I found

it in Blofeld's (1960) book, with the caption "The King and Queen of Yao." Not recognizing them, or what to make of Blofeld's notion that Mien here had had a "King and Queen," I brought a photocopy to the area and subsequently learned the identity of the couple.¹⁶ After many descendants then asked me for a copy of the photo which then I provided, it seems that I played some role in local people's refashioning their relations to their past.

Photographs, like statues, are productive of a past that has a social reality to the extent that it informs the present. Like ritual links, images are entangled in dynamics that produce localities through engagements with extra-local factors. The memories that are fashioned in this way are clearly social, but it does not follow that the effort is collective. While the proposed statue of Phaya Khiri was in part motivated to assert the place of Mien within Thai national space, it was one man's idea. The headmaster of the Pangkha school wanted to counter the increasing marginalization of people's livelihood with his plan to encourage a resort area in the hills where farmers are no longer allowed to live. Through the way he described his plans to me, local

people could benefit from jobs at the proposed resort. There is an ambiguous link between the collective position of Mien within Thailand through the proposed statue and low-paid menial jobs at a resort whose clientele would most likely be Thai. As in Indonesia (Kipp 1993), it shows how political maneuvering for the recognition of minority ethnic groups is primarily a middle-class phenomenon which suggests that the intended benefits may contribute to the processes of marginalization that they supposedly counter.

The proposed statue draws on a national framework for the recognition of administrative units. Attempting a statue at the sub-district level is not conventional, but this is the highest administrative level that Mien can make a claim to. While the statue has not materialized, the social project that it draws on relates to the waning of the household in public life and the increasing prominence of villages and sub-districts as frameworks for social life in this region. In this context, the growing role of photographic links to the past focuses attention on the household as a repository for recollections that are related to this change in the social focus of local life.

A growing number of photographs on the walls of Mien households are for one thing a manifestation of the current immobility of farming populations. As migratory swiddening has been precluded, people have refashioned the place of the household in social life. National integration and political economic change have effectively ended the prominence of the household as the focus of social dynamics through farming and feasting. These processes have supported the social prominence of administrative units, in the context of which that administrators (such as headmen and headmasters) have been able increasingly to mobilize people's labor, resources, and attention.

The household as a social unit has not disappeared, but it is increasingly existing through its links to the village. The growing importance of photographic links to the past of Thao La and Phaya Khiri at the household level can be construed as a creative response to this condition. While people are less able to assert the agency of the household, and their social

life is increasingly in terms of a village and a sub-district, the household can reverse that relationship by appropriating the photographic images of Thao La and Phaya Khiri as markers of a common Mien past within the national space of Thailand. Such projects respond to marginalization that locate a collective past on a household wall, sometimes along with photos of the King and Queen of Thailand and posters of resort landscapes. These displays combine claims to a local past with a national imagery for modern households. The politics of such combinations of representations are domestic. They sidestep the issue of social marginalization through photo images that combine the household with ethnic and national imagery that blurs the lines of past and present and leaves out the reality of current administrative units. Such projects of the household are not of the same order as Lisu recollections that denied assertive headmen their ambitions through stories that killed them off, but they nonetheless deny the everyday prominence of locally-powerful people by not giving them a place on their wall.

Conclusions

The state was never absent from upland dynamics. Historically, hinterland populations situated themselves in relation to the state as a feature of the social landscape. This they did equally by farming beyond the state's reach, by establishing contracts for particular kinds of relations, and by appropriating the prowess of particular lowland rulers as spirits. The relationships that uplanders had with pre-modern states do not add up to a one-dimensional relationship, nor did villages or larger units collectively make or maintain these relationships. My case of a Mien/Hmong migration and the varying dimensions of a cult to a King's Spirit that emerged from it views complex trajectories of history at the interface of the upland-lowland divide. The continually shifting frameworks of agency and structure run counter to the often-implicit socio-centricity of classical ethnography. If founder-cults are an ethnographic category, my case suggests that they are not a structural feature that a population somehow has, but rather one of many alternative frameworks for projecting particular social

imaginations in local life and simultaneously a framework for defining what constitutes the local.

The King's Spirit cult among a segment of Thailand's Mien fits a more general pattern of highland religious life, where the spirit-related invulnerability of a leader attracts followers. Although this attraction weakened as these people entered a more peaceful situation, the leader's prominence was prolonged by his position as a titled official and tribute collector, and his and then his sons' position as middlemen in dealings with the Royal Opium Monopoly. The cult emphasis changed as Mien religion and social dynamics were transformed from an emphasis on prowess to successful farming and trade. This created inflationary pressure on the cult leader's household size that was reinforced by his unequal position in opium production and trade.

The King's Spirit cult never became active at the village level; it stayed centered on the leader's household and was primarily relevant in relation to the leader's role in upholding law and order. As highlanders became incorporated into the Thai state, the relevance of this cult and the prominence of this lineage of leaders has been redefined. The cult lost its prominence as national integration undermined swidden cultivation and competitive householding. In their place, the village and the school have emerged as the sites for mobilizing people for public events. This benefits a nephew and rival of the current headman, who together with his brothers are reformulating notions of leadership and have elevated Tsan Khwoen's status to that of the founder of the Mien population, worthy of a statue to commemorate this feat.

While the importance of Tsan Khwoen's link to the King's Spirit faded as the household lost its organizational prominence, the rise of the village and the school as the centers of local social life has coincided with a fundamental reworking of what frames people's social identity. In this new context, allegiance to national frameworks of culture, agriculture, and social life is simultaneously an aspect of the state's hegemony and a framework for hinterland communities' access to official assistance. New actors and agendas have gained prominence. Tsan Khwoen was once a leader and a link to the King's Spirit. Now he is becoming a

posthumous founder and the link to the national space of Thailand. The case suggests ruptures as much as continuities in Mien ways of fashioning locality within larger settings. It points equally to the common predicament of populations on the margins of the modern state, and how such settings play unequally to the range of local actors and interests.

The current marginalization of the household, particularly in contrast to its social prominence during the period of "classical" ethnography in the northern Thai hills, is a fact. But the status of such facts, as those about migrations and ethnic groups, depends on the often-implicit context of their interpretation. I have attempted to show that migration was neither about an entry into Thailand nor about "ethnic" behavior more generally. Instead, and more significantly, this migration was a motivated action within particular historical and cosmological frameworks that involved and affected the relative position of chiefs and commoners, just as more recent dynamics have unevenly benefitted the interests of households, villages, and sub-districts. Because these changes suggest that the household is primarily acting through these higher levels of social integration, it is useful to study of the lack of a reflection of this reality among images on the walls of modern houses. Although domestic imagery does not reflect political relations, households can invert their otherwise-subordinate relationship to the village and sub-district. They may choose to disregard the prominence of certain administrative levels in constructions of the household and its members within national and international frames of reference.

From an obviously marginal position, contemporary Mien households contribute to definitions of history, identity, and locality that do not match those of more prominent actors. National integration of the highlands has precluded household mobility, and thus particular kinds of engagements with larger worlds, some of which (e.g. migratory farming) are central to anthropological accounts of the lifeways of particular ethnic groups. In spite of sedentarization, households continue to redefine their position toward larger realities. Through the rather innocuous assemblies of pictures on

their walls, Mien householders pose implicit challenges to conventional anthropological portrayals of highlanders' realities as grounded in a past time of ritual structures and ecological adaptation. Some pictures, such as the photos of Phaya Khiri and Thao La, avail people of a reach

into their past, but this is less a sign of nostalgia than a means to a particular present through the projection of certain social visions. In this, there is a fundamental continuity with the previous and apparently dissimilar reality of migration, farming, and rituals on the fringes of the state.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the National Research Council of Thailand for permission to conduct research from October 1992 to August 1994. I was affiliated with the Tribal Research Institute, the Social Research Institute of Chiang Mai University, and Payap University. Funding for my research was provided by grants from the U.S. National Science Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the Nordic Institute for Asian Studies, and the Walter F. Vella Scholarship Fund. I thank these agencies and institutions for their support. Many people in Chiang Mai and in Mien villages in Phayao and Chiang Rai Provinces provided kind assistance to my project, for which I am very grateful. Responsibility for interpretations expressed in this article rests with me alone.

Notes

¹ Mien are one of many subgroups of Yao. Yao identity, which was sanctioned by the Chinese Empire, referred to people living outside of the state in the forested hinterlands. All of Thailand's Yao are Mien. In Laos, there are both Lantien and Mien groups of Yao. There is significantly more complexity, in terms of Yao social formation, cultural forms, religious variation, and livelihood, in both Vietnam and China.

² They did not invent this scheme. The map, aside from the arrows across the national border, is an articulation of a map produced by the Tribal Research Institute in 1978. Earlier researchers, such as Gordon Young and Erik Seidenfaden, are important predecessors to this characterization.

³ This paragraph is not meant to settle the historical record in the hinterlands, but rather as a starting point to addressing the regional dynamics and relationships that influenced social formations in the uplands.

⁴ This refers to the forced pacification that French and British colonial takeovers involved in the regions that became Burma, Laos, and Cambodia, from the

1880s to the 1940s.

⁵ In Lai Chau and Son La Provinces, respectively. Another possibility is that the Muang La in question is in Yunnan Province.

⁶ "Chinese warlords" is a gloss that is not necessarily accurate. The so-called Ho warlords that were causing trouble in northern Lao domains in the 1870s and '80s were sometimes "Chinese," but Thongchai (1994:103–04) shows that in some cases the so-called Ho were in fact rulers of Lao domains (see also Breazeale and Snit 1988:47–9) such as Muang Lai, and that the notion of Lao rulers as Ho was in part to justify their suppression.

⁷ Thailand, that was Siam at the time, took its present shape as Britain and France claimed bounded territories to the west and east. According to Thongchai (1994), the Paknam Crisis of 1893 was significant for the move toward the modern mapping of the polity. The other aspect of this issue, whether there was "Siam/Thailand" to enter at the time (1880s) concerns the administrative integration of provinces. Until the Thesaphiban system, that was initiated in 1893, Nan was not dependent on Bangkok financially, and with this integration the kingdom of Nan lost the ability to tax local peasants for its own maintenance. The way these changes affected Nan are likely to have influenced the court's dealings with the Mien leader.

⁸ Kunstadter's (1967) informants refer to Khun Luang Wilangka's defeat by Queen Jamathewi (see also Kraisi 1967) as the precursor to these relationships. Renard (1986:237) refers to a seventeenth-century agreement between Burmese rulers of Chiang Mai and Lua' populations, as reaffirming a sixteenth century contract. I suggest that similar to the case of Yao in China, these contracts established the prominence of particular leaders in the hinterlands and reaffirm particular ethnic hierarchies. This last point is important because there is some indication that there were Karen populations in "northern Thai" areas significantly before the nineteenth century. Their history disappears because official contracts were only with Lua'. I suggest that

the assumption that there were only Lua' in the highlands until the nineteenth century draws on the rhetorical framework of contracts. As in the case of Yao in China, contracts assume a particular ethnic identity, that then becomes reaffirmed as people engage with courts.

⁹ The persons who are invited to become village owner spirits thus come from a pool of lower-order rulers, of the same administrative level that a village or a village cluster might attach itself to in social life. People refer to some of the individual officials as having been Burmese (Maan). Two villages, Pang Ma-O and Huai Feuang have the same couple, Phanya Haan and I Nya Nang, as their owner spirits. The village of Sakoen has two, Cao Long Comphu (Chao Luang Chomphu) and Cao Long Kiemkham. The village of Pangkha is said to have an owner spirit who had been a Kaw, who had the name/title Cao Long Comphu. He may be the same character as the owner spirit of Sakoen. The Kaw settlement is said to have initially been at the site of present-day Pangkha, but to have later moved to Sakoen. According to Krairi Nimmanhaeminda (personal communication to Ronald Renard, 1980s) the Kaw were settled in the late nineteenth century in Sakoen in order to collect bat guano for the Nan ruler. The Mien settlement in Sakoen is adjacent to but independent from the Kaw village. When provincial administration was applied to this area in the 1940s, then at the border of two provinces, the Kaw village opted to continue their relationship with Nan while the Mien settlement became part of Chiang Rai

¹⁰ It is likely that the initial contract was made with King Ananta, who died in 1891 after reigning for forty years. He was then succeeded by his son, Cao Suliyaphong Phalittidet, who reigned from his father's death and until his own death in 1918 (Wyatt 1994: 118–28). Many of the important relationships that the Mien group had with the lowlands were forged during the latter's reign. It is interesting that both Tsan Khwoen and his son received a title from the Nan ruler; they receive the family-name Srisombat sometime after 1914. In comparison with Chiang Mai, it appears that the ruler of Nan was able to hold on to royal prerogatives (the granting of titles, etc.) longer after the administrative integration of the northern region with Bangkok.

¹¹ The relationship with the Royal Opium Monopoly started in 1907 and lasted to 1957 (see Jonsson 1996b, Ch.4). For this 50 year period, this Mien population had a permit for cultivation and trade. There may

have been some illegal cultivation prior to or outside of this official relationship. I have not found any published information on the place of Nan in relation to opium production in Thailand, and the only public statement that I have seen, an official report to the Ministry of Finance from 1938, suggests that this production in Nan was not known in Bangkok (Jonsson 1996b:166–70). With the provincial administrative reforms, that in effect undid Nan's autonomy, Nan lost its authority to tax its former subjects in rice, thus creating a market for rice that worked to the Mien's advantage. See McCoy (1991) for an account of the monopoly and other opium trade.

¹² This refers primarily to King Suliyaphong (r.1891–1918), the penultimate king of Nan. Tsan Khwoen (Phaya Khiri) died soon after the king, in about the mid-1920s. By the late 1920s, Wuen Lin (Thao La) had moved his settlement to Phulangka, thus outside the trade relations involving Nan. By the 1940s, authorities revoked a previous relationship and delineated the Mien area as a tambon (sub-district).

¹³ The non-Mien way of preparing the beef is influenced by contemporary fashion in upcountry Thai restaurants. Mien do not keep cattle, and the only other case I know of when beef was served was in 1915 when Phaya Khiri was feasting a visiting American missionary. He bought the ox from lowland Tai farmers and had the missionary's cook prepare it (Callender 1915).

¹⁴ The attacks on Hmong and other uplanders during the late 1960s and early 70s were primarily in the adjacent highlands of Nan and Chiang Rai Provinces. The area of my fieldwork belonged at that time to the portion of Chiang Rai that became Phayao Province in 1978.

¹⁵ Schools are a novel element in village life, in the context of 1960s ethnography. One peculiarity of the area where I worked is that the headmaster and one other teacher are local Mien, which probably enables the school to contribute to local dynamics more than if all the teachers were ethnically Thai.

¹⁶ Thao La had three wives. The third wife, who is with him on the photo, was named Pung Nai Foei.

References

- Appadurai, Arjun
1996 The Production of Locality. In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, pp.

- 178–199. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Beard, Tim; Betsey Warrick; and Kao Cho Saefong
1995 *In the Old, Old Days. Traditional Stories of the Iu Mien*, vol. 2. Berkeley: Laotian Handicraft Project.
- Bloch, Maurice
1986 *From Blessing to Violence: History and Ideology in the Circumcision Ritual of the Merina of Madagascar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blofeld, John
1955 Some Hilltribes of North Thailand (Meos and Yaos). *Journal of the Siam Society* 43: 1–20.
1960 *People of the Sun: Encounters in Siam*. London: Hutchinson.
- Breazeale, Kennon and Snit Smuckarn
1988 *A Culture in Search of Survival: The Phuan of Thailand and Laos*. New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies Monographs.
- Bunchuai Srisawasdi
1950 *30 Chat Nai Chiang Rai* [30 Nationalities of Chiang Rai (Province)]. Bangkok: Odeon Store.
- Callender, C. R., Rev.
1915 Among the Yao. *Laos News* 12 (3): 80–5.
- Clifford, James
1986 On Ethnographic Allegory. In *Writing Culture*, J. Clifford and G. Marcus, eds., pp. 98–121. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Condominas, Georges
1990 *From Lawa to Mon, from Saa' to Thai: Historical and Anthropological Aspects of Southeast Asian Social Spaces*. Canberra: Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University.
- Cooper, Robert
1984 *Resource Scarcity and the Hmong Response*. Singapore: Singapore University Press.
- Cunningham, Clark
1989 Celebrating a Toba Batak National Hero: An Indonesian Rite of Identity. In *Changing Lives, Changing Rites: Ritual and Social Dynamics in Philippine and Indonesian Uplands*, Susan D. Russell and C. E. Cunningham, eds, pp. 167–200. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies.
- Dessaint, Alain Y.
1971 Lisu Migration in the Thai Highlands. *Ethnology* 10 (3): 329–48.
- Diamond, Norma
1993 Ethnicity and the State: The Hua Miao of Southwest China. In *Ethnicity and the State*, Judith Toland, ed., pp. 55–78. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Drakard, Jane
1990 *A Malay Frontier: Unity and Duality in a Sumatran Kingdom*. Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program.
- Durrenberger, E. Paul
1983 Lisu: Political Form, Ideology, and Economic Action. In *Highlanders of Thailand*, John McKinnon and Wanat Bhruksasri, eds., pp. 215–26. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Geddes, William R.
1976 *Migrants of the Mountains: The Cultural Ecology of the Blue Miao (Hmong Njua) of Thailand*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hinton, Peter
1973 Population Dynamics and Dispersal Trends among the Karen of Northern Thailand. In *Studies in Contemporary Thailand*, R. Ho and E. C. Chapman, eds., pp. 235–51. Canberra: Australian National University.
1979 The Karen, Millenarianism, and the Politics of Accommodation to Lowland States. In *Ethnic Adaptation and Identity: The Karen on the Thai Frontier with Burma*, C. Keyes, ed. pp. 81–94. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
1983 Do the Karen Really Exist? In *Highlanders of Thailand*, John McKinnon and Wanat Bhruksasri, eds., pp. 155–68. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.
- Hoskins, Janet
1987 The Headhunter as Hero: Local Traditions and their Reinterpretation in National History. *American Ethnologist* 14: 605–22.
- Hutheesing, Otome Klein
1990 *Emerging Sexual Inequality Among the Lisu of Northern Thailand: The Waning of Dog and Elephant Repute*. Leiden: Brill.
- Jonsson, Hjorleifur
1996a Rhetorics and Relations: Tai States, Forests, and Upland Groups. In *State Power and Culture in Thailand*, E. Paul Durrenberger ed., pp. 166–200. New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies Monographs.
1996b *Shifting Social Landscape: Mien (Yao) Upland Communities and Histories and in State-Client Settings*. Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University.
1997 Cultural Priorities and Projects: Health and Social Dynamics in Northeast Cambodia. In

- Development or Domestication? Indigenous Peoples of Southeast Asia*, Don McCaskill and Ken Kampe, eds., pp. 536–67. Chiang Mai: Silkworm.
- 1998a Forest Products and Peoples: Upland Groups, Thai Polities, and Regional Space. *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 13 (1):1–37.
- 1998b Dead Headmen: Histories and Communities in the Southeast Asian Hinterland. In *Facets of Power and Its Limitations: Political Culture in Southeast Asia*, Ing-Britt Trankell and Laura Summers, eds., pp. 191–212. Uppsala: Uppsala University, Department of Anthropology. Uppsala Studies in Cultural Anthropology, 24.
- 1999 Traditional Tribal What? Sports, Culture, and the State in the Northern Hills of Thailand. In *Turbulent Times and Enduring Peoples: Mountain Minorities in the South-East Asian Massif*, Jean Michaud, ed., pp. 219–45. London: Curzon.
- 2000 Yao Minority Identity and the Location of Difference in the South China Borderlands. *Ethnos* 65 (in press).
- n.d. a Does the House Hold? Adoptions, History, and the Shape of Mien (Yao) Society. Unpublished ms.
- n.d. b Serious Fun: Minority Cultural Dynamics and National Integration in Northern Thailand. Unpublished ms.
- Kandre, Peter
- 1991 Passing Through the Countries, Years, and Life. In *The Yao of South China: Recent International Studies*, Jacques Lemoine and Chiao Chien, eds., pp. 273–310. Paris: Pangu.
- Kipp, Rita S.
- 1993 *Dissociated Identities: Ethnicity, Religion, and Class in an Indonesian Society*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Kirsch, A. Thomas
- 1973 *Feasting and Social Oscillation: Religion and Society in Upland Southeast Asia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, Data Paper no. 92.
- Kraisri Nimmanhaeminda
- 1967 The Lawa Guardian Spirits of Chiengmai. *Journal of the Siam Society* 55 (2):185–225.
- Kunstadter, Peter
- 1967 The Lua' and Skaw Karen of Maehongson Province. In *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations*, P. Kunstadter, ed., vol. 2, pp. 639–74. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kunstadter, Peter and Sally Kunstadter
- 1992 Population Movements and Environmental Changes in the Hills of Northern Thailand. In *Patterns and Illusions: Thai History and Thought*. Gehan Wijeyewardene and E. C. Chapman eds., pp. 17–56. Canberra: The Australian National University.
- Leach, Edmund R.
- 1954 *Political Systems of Highland Burma*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Lehman, F.K.
- 1963 *The Structure of Chin Society*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- le May, Reginald
- 1926 *An Asian Arcady: The Land and People of Northern Siam*. Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons.
- Lemoine, Jacques
- 1982 *Yao Ceremonial Paintings*. Bangkok: White Lotus.
- Lewis, Paul and Elaine Lewis
- 1984 *Peoples of the Golden Triangle: Six Tribes in Thailand*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Lombard, Sylvia
- 1968 *Yao-English Dictionary*. Herbert C. Purnell, ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program.
- McCoy, Alfred
- 1991 *The Politics of Heroin*. New York: Lawrence Hill Books.
- Miles, Douglas
- 1967–68 Research in the Yao Village of Phulangka, Amphur Pong, Changwad Chiang Rai. Field Reports 1–8. Chiang Mai: Tribal Research Centre (mimeo.).
- 1974 *Marriage, Agriculture, and Ancestor Worship Among the Phulangka Yao*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Sydney.
- 1990 Capitalism and the Structure of Yao Descent Units in China and Thailand: A Comparison of Youling (1938) and Phulangka (1968). In *Ethnic Groups Across National Boundaries in Mainland Southeast Asia*, Gehan Wijeyewardene, ed., pp. 134–48. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Ortner, Sherry
- 1995 Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37 (1): 173–93.
- Park, David, Rev.
- 1907 Report from Nan. *Laos News* 4 (4): 107–08.
- Radley, Howard

- 1986 *Economic Marginalization and Ethnic Consciousness among the Green Mong of Northwestern Thailand*. Ph.D. thesis, Corpus Christi College, Oxford University.
- Renard, Ronald D.
1986 The Integration of Karens in Northern Thai Political Life During the Nineteenth Century. In *Anuson Walter Vella*, R. Renard, ed., pp. 229–48. Honolulu: Southeast Asia Papers, Center for Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Hawaii at Manoa.
- Sahlins, Marshall
1985 *Islands of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Salemink, Oscar
1994 The Return of the Python God: Multiple Interpretations of a Millenarian Movement in Colonial Vietnam. *History and Anthropology* 8: 129–164.
- Swearer, Donald K. and Sommai Premchit
1998 *The Legend of Queen Cama*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Tannenbaum, Nicola
2000 Phaya Sihanatraja and the Founding of Maehongson. In *Founder's Cults in Southeast Asia: Ancestors, Agriculture, and Polity*, ed. by N. Tannenbaum and C.A. Kammerer. New Haven: Yale Southeast Asia Monographs (in press).
- Tapp, Nicholas
1989 *Sovereignty and Rebellion: The White Hmong of Northern Thailand*. Singapore: Oxford University Press.
- Taussig, Michael
1992 Maleficium: State Fetishism. In *The Nervous System*, pp. 111–40. New York: Routledge.
- Thongchai Winichakul
1994 *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Tsing, Anna L.
1987 A Rhetoric of Centers in a Religion on the Periphery. In *Indonesian Religions in Transition*, Rita Smith Kipp and Susan Rodgers, eds., pp. 187–210. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- 1993 *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Walker, Anthony
1974 Messianic Movements among the Lahu of the Yunnan-Indochina Borderlands. *Southeast Asia: An International Quarterly* 3: 699–711.
- Wolters, O. W.
1982 *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Wyatt, David K., transl. and ed.
1994 *The Nan Chronicle*. Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program.